

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Mirror Lake Project
Yosemite National Park
July 1996

PROPOSED ACTION

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to restore, protect, and interpret a broad range of cultural and natural resources at Mirror Lake in Yosemite National Park. Visitor services, interpretation, and wayfinding would also be improved, including the installation of two vault toilets, benches, viewing areas, and an all-access interpretive trail. The actions proposed are necessary to repair impacts which threaten the integrity of cultural and natural resources in the area, and to provide adequate interpretive and visitor services.

The following three alternatives were considered: 1) No action; 2) the proposed action - restore natural processes and manage Mirror Lake as a cultural landscape; and 3) restore natural processes and manage Mirror Lake as wilderness. A complete description of the proposal and its impacts is contained in the Environmental Assessment (EA), Mirror Lake Project, Yosemite National Park.

WHY THE PROPOSED ACTION WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

The NPS has determined the proposed action can be implemented with no significant adverse effect to natural and cultural resources as documented by the environmental assessment. The removal of the upper parking lot, upper road, and stone retaining wall will temporarily scar the landscape. Soil will be disturbed throughout the site by grading and trail construction. This project includes mitigation measures to restore disturbed areas and reduce impacts. There will be no long-term adverse impacts on any threatened or endangered species, wetlands, or floodplains.

Construction activities will also cause minor short term reductions in air and scenic qualities, wildlife habitat, vegetation, and ecological interrelationships for short periods of time during a one year period. Long term effects on air and scenic qualities, wildlife habitat, vegetation, and ecological relationships would be positive.

There will be no effect on National Register of Historic Places properties. There would be an impact to the stone retaining wall which dates from 1928, however the removal of the stone retaining wall will allow for the repair of the 1860 era carriage road.

No prehistoric habitation sites have been identified in the area. In the unlikely event that unknown archeological resources are uncovered during construction, work would be stopped in the discovery area and the NPS would consult according to 36 CFR 800.11 and, as applicable, provisions of the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND AVAILABILITY

This environmental assessment was released for a 30-day public review period starting June 1, 1996 and ending July 1, 1996. Written comments were received from:

Rosemarie Astwood
Brian H. Ouzounian
Tuolumne County, Planning Department, Mike Laird, Senior Planner
Tuolumne County, Planning Department, Robin Wood, Senior Planner
Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, John Buckley
National Parks and Conservation Association, Brian Huse, Director, Pacific Region
Native Habitats, Georgia Stigall
Yosemite Restoration Trust, Judith Kunofsky, Executive Director

The majority of comments offered support for the preferred alternative. A summary of substantive concerns raised and NPS responses follows:

COMMENT from Rosemarie Astwood: Would the restoration improve insect populations and related food webs? **NPS Response:** The improvement of the insect community and related food webs would be directly proportional to the amount and quality of habitat gained. Since there would be a net gain of improved riparian habitat, all life associated with this biotic community should improve.

COMMENT from Rosemarie Astwood: When I visited in May of 1966, it appeared that parts of Alternative B were already being implemented. Does this mean the plan is already being implemented? **NPS Response:** Yes, it is true that some aspects included in the plan have been initiated. In particular, restoration of some portions of the now abandoned upper parking lot, picnic area, and stock trail was begun in 1995. These actions were approved under a previous National Environmental Policy Act compliance action (Categorical Exclusion #95-01a).

COMMENT from the National Parks and Conservation Association, Brian Huse, Director, Pacific Region: The hydrologic evaluation in Appendix C recommends the removal of human-made debris followed by monitoring. However, Alternative B does not clearly respond to this suggested fluvial restoration. **NPS Response:** NPS staff has determined that the potential for silt loading into Tenaya Creek associated with the removal of human placed rock debris in the Mirror Lake dam could have permanent adverse effects on riparian systems downstream. The scope of the plan would need to be increased dramatically to include the mitigation of the effects of the removal of all human placed debris, therefore the removal of human placed debris was not included in the plan.

COMMENT from the National Parks and Conservation Association, Brian Huse, Director, Pacific Region: We support the plan to restore willow flycatcher habitat. However, we would like to know the actual potential for the species to establish itself in this busy area. Is this part of a larger effort? **NPS Response:** NPS Wildlife Biologists believe that when suitable willow flycatcher habitat is restored at Mirror Lake, true potential will exist for the species to establish itself, despite the volume of visitor traffic. The principle causes for the decline of the willow flycatcher appear to be the alteration and destruction of riparian habitats, and possibly nest parasitism from brown-headed cowbirds, disturbance from grazing, and disturbance on wintering grounds. The park is currently in the middle of a study determining the effects of the (non-native) brown-headed cowbird on native species, and is pursuing an active program of riparian restoration along the Merced River and its tributaries.

COMMENT from the National Parks and Conservation Association, Brian Huse, Director, Pacific Region: We would like to know the potential for construction activities to disturb nearby

roosting bats. **NPS Response:** No impacts to preferred roost sites of bats residing in Yosemite Valley are anticipated. Our knowledge of actual bat roosts in the Mirror Lake area is limited. Most known bat species roost in cracks and overhangs in the adjacent cliffs. Based on the distances of potential roost sites to the activity site, 1,000 feet or greater, the screening of sight and noise by tree canopy movement and noise should be attenuated to a level equal to the ambient daily activity of the area.

COMMENT from the National Parks and Conservation Association, Brian Huse, Director, Pacific Region: There is mention of the degradation of the area due to the "intrusive volume of horse manure" from stock use on the loop trail. We would like to know how the park is planning to control this contamination. **NPS Response:** At Mirror Lake, the NPS will manage stock use in ways that minimizes stock related ecological impacts while recognizing the recreational and traditional values of horseback riding. We will analyze stock related impacts in the Mirror Lake area, including potential contamination to aquatic resources from stock waste. To remain consistent with past stock management actions implemented elsewhere in Yosemite, stock management decisions at Mirror Lake will ultimately be made based upon the findings of the resource analyses, as well as with input from the public.

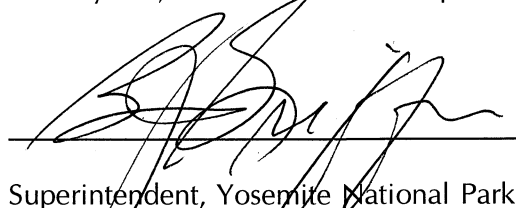
COMMENT from the Yosemite Restoration Trust, Judith Kunofsky, Executive Director: We are disappointed in the omission of any estimate of the cost of the alternatives, particularly of the preferred alternative. **NPS Response:** As cost estimates are not a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in the formulation of an Environmental Assessment, the NPS did not include them as a part of this document. Relative costs of alternatives were not used in making the decision on the preferred alternative and no cost/benefit report was compiled.

COMMENT from the Yosemite Restoration Trust, Judith Kunofsky, Executive Director: We suggest that the *Yosemite Guide* urge visitors to carry water to Mirror Lake, and that the concessioner promote this in its visitor facilities. **NPS Response:** This is a helpful suggestion and will be passed on to the appropriate personnel.

DETERMINATION

Based on the information contained in the environmental assessment as summarized, public comments, and mitigating measures to be employed, it is the determination of the National Park Service that the proposed project is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Nor is the proposed action without precedent or similar to one that normally requires an environmental impact statement. Therefore, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Recommended:


Superintendent, Yosemite National Park

8/7/96

Date

Approved:



8/22/96

Acting Field Director, Pacific West Field Area

Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT - MIRROR LAKE PROJECT MITIGATION MATRIX

IMPACT	MITIGATION - (RESPONSIBLE PARTY)		TIMEFRAME
Air Quality:	No permanent adverse impacts: temporary adverse impacts from dust and fumes of equipment	Surface disturbing activities to be coupled with water sprinkling to reduce fugitive dust. (Louise Johnson)	During construction when necessary
Soil Disturbance:	Some soils would be disturbed by decompaction, grading, road removal, and trail construction.	Apply native mulch and retain soil profile and topography. Provide for adequate surface drainage. Mulch restored slopes. A prescription for revegetating disturbed areas will be carried out immediately after construction is complete. (Louise Johnson)	During construction and restoration
Land Use:	The qualities of the scenic vista would not change and would improve with the restoration of the fluvial cycle. There would be temporary obstructions of the scene during construction.	Visitor information will be available to assist people in planning a visit to Mirror Lake during a time when construction is not in progress. (Public Information Office). Most heavy equipment use will take place in fall on weekdays. Temporary signs will be provided during restoration. (Louise Johnson)	During construction.
Water/Wetlands:	Removing the railroad irons from the dam may disturb sediments.	Work on the dam will be done when surface flow is nonexistent. Monitoring will take place above and below the dam and the potential impacts of the sediment on the stream channel will be evaluated. (Louise Johnson)	Fall - when surface flows are nonexistent
Vegetation	Vegetation may be lost in the construction of the trail. No impacts to any federally listed, proposed, or sensitive plants will be affected.	Revegetation is required for all disturbed areas where appropriate. Species and seed sources used in revegetation will be endemic to the park. Revegetation will occur as soon as possible following disturbance to minimize time available for colonization by exotics. Only weed-free materials will be used. Topsoil will be saved for reclamation use. Plants will be salvaged from areas where loss is anticipated due to construction activities. (Susan Fritzsche)	During restoration
Wildlife Habitat	Increased human activity associated with construction may disturb some wildlife. Mobile animals may be temporarily disturbed.	Disturbances will be temporary. Scheduling of work for the fall will avoid peak reproductive periods. In time, increased vegetative cover will provide for greater wildlife habitat. (Louise Johnson)	During construction and restoration